



Marxist Threat in Venezuela

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CARACAS, Venezuela, April 12 — The Christian Democratic Party in Venezuela, COPEI, has always staked its future on winning the country's youth.

In a nation where half the population is under 20 years of age, the moderately leftist COPEI has had a happy hunting ground.

Today concern is expressed here that COPEI's own youth movement has been effectively captured by strident Marxists.

MODERATE

The older and traditional leadership of the party is still headed by Dr. Rafael Caldera, moderate, who could be the country's next president. However, in the months ahead he might be squeezed out of leadership or have to yield to extremist elements.

Dr. Caldera acknowledges that some members of the party frequently sound more anti-American than communists here, but he says the U. S. need not worry about COPEI's true democratic sentiments.

The older COPEI heads brush off extremist statements by some of the party youth and

union leaders as "hot-headed and impetuous." They insist that diatribes against "U. S. imperialism" comes from a wing of the party which doesn't represent majority thought.

FUTURE

The moderates point out that Christian Democratic movements, which some observers see as the wave of the future in Latin America as the most effective antidote for communist encroachment, have many differences of opinion within individual parties.

At the last COPEI youth convention, a statement of party policy proposed a two-phase program for Venezuela's giant oil industry.

The first phase called for greater state control, including taking over the national market for the government's oil company and studying a rise in taxes for the private petroleum companies operating here.

SECOND PHASE

The second phase would provide for outright nationalization of the oil industry.

The "statement of principles" of the youth movement does not dovetail with the COPEI platform, but it does reflect the thinking of a strong element of its young rank-and-file.

In the 1963 presidential election, COPEI won 20 per cent of the vote and was second to the triumphant Democratic Action Party, which squeaked to victory with just over 32 per cent.

The next elections are almost three years away, but already it is conceded that COPEI will be the chief challenger against Democratic Action.

Dr. Caldera must move cautiously between now and the pre-election party convention. He cannot expect to win the presidency if COPEI becomes sharply divided over the activities of the radical elements of its youth movement.